

Brief Summary of NIH Foreign Interference Cases

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2021-12-26

This report summarizes the characteristics and outcomes of NIH foreign interference compliance reviews as of December 26, 2021. We focus on the 229 cases in which staff from the NIH Office of Extramural Research have contacted institutions.

Table 1 shows characteristics of foreign interference cases according to the original source of concerns. The most common source was internal, that is agency staff discovering discrepancies in grant documents and published materials. Self-disclosures have increased in the last two years, while referrals from the DOJ or FBI have decreased. Most affected scientists are self-reported as Asian, which is not surprising giving the well-described recruiting efforts on the part of the government and institutions of the PRC. The proportion of white scientists is greater for self-disclosed cases, but nearly one-third of these came from one institution (Moffitt Cancer Center). Note that we do not collect data on citizenship or national origin. The PRC accounted for the vast majority of foreign interference concerns.

Table 2 show outcomes of compliance reviews to date. Even though most reviews are still open, we have already determined that for over 80 percent of cases there was at least one *serious* compliance violation (that is undisclosed grant support, undisclosed talents award, undisclosed equity, undisclosed patent, or other undisclosed financial conflict of interest). Less than 10 percent were found to have no violation (that is, no undisclosed foreign affiliation *and* no *serious* violation). Over half of scientists were removed from NIH grants (either through institutional separation or other internal institutional actions). Table 3 show the same data according to the original source of concerns.

There have been few cases that have led to criminal and civil actions. To date there have been two indictments (Lin Yang at the University of Florida and Mohammad Faghihi at the University of Miami) and three convictions (Charles Lieber at Harvard University, Xiao-Jiang Li at Emory University, and Song-Guo Zheng at Ohio State University). There have been two false-claims civil settlements (both with Van Andel Research Institute). We also note that given the large number of open, ongoing reviews the outcomes values may be underestimates.

Table 1: Characteristics of foreign interference cases reported to the NIH Office of Extramural Research (OER) according to the original source of concerns. Values shown are for cases in which NIH Staff have contacted the Institution. Values shown are Number (%). Percentages do not necessarily add up to 100 due to missing or withheld values. PRC = People’s Republic of China.

Characteristic		Internal	Self Disclosure	DOJ or FBI
Total N (%)		110 (48.0)	68 (29.7)	51 (22.3)
Year Institution Contacted	2018 or 2019	94 (85.5)	21 (30.9)	43 (84.3)
	2020 or 2021	16 (14.5)	47 (69.1)	8 (15.7)
Gender	Male	90 (81.8)	59 (86.8)	37 (72.5)
	Female	17 (15.5)	7 (10.3)	10 (19.6)
Race	Asian	89 (80.9)	44 (64.7)	39 (76.5)
	White	16 (14.5)	18 (26.5)	3 (5.9)
Country of Concern	PRC	102 (92.7)	54 (84.4)	51 (100.0)

Table 2: Outcomes of NIH foreign interference cases. Values shown are for cases in which NIH Staff have contacted the Institution. FCOI = financial conflict of interest. Values shown are Number (%).

Outcome	Number
Total N (%)	229 (100.0)
Undisclosed Affiliation	194 (85.5)
Undisclosed Grant Support	158 (69.6)
Undisclosed Talents Award	124 (54.6)
Undisclosed Equity, Patent, or FCOI	35 (15.3)
Any Serious Violation	191 (83.4)
No Violation	14 (6.1)
Termination or Resignation	93 (40.6)
Institutional Exclusion from Grants	49 (21.6)
Removed from Grants	142 (62.0)
Removed from Peer Review	187 (81.7)
Status of Compliance Review Open	175 (76.4)

Table 3: Outcomes of NIH foreign interference cases according to the original source of concerns. Values shown are for cases in which NIH Staff have contacted the Institution. FCOI = financial conflict of interest. Values shown are Number (%).

Outcome	Internal	Self Disclosure	DOJ or FBI
Total N (%)	110 (48.0)	68 (29.7)	51 (22.3)
Undisclosed Affiliation	91 (82.7)	55 (83.3)	48 (94.1)
Undisclosed Grant Support	81 (73.6)	37 (56.1)	40 (78.4)
Undisclosed Talents Award	44 (40.0)	33 (50.0)	47 (92.2)
Undisclosed Equity, Patent, or FCOI	14 (12.7)	16 (23.5)	5 (9.8)
Any Serious Violation	90 (81.8)	53 (77.9)	48 (94.1)
Termination or Resignation	34 (30.9)	36 (52.9)	23 (45.1)
Institutional Removal from Grants	33 (30.0)	9 (13.6)	7 (13.7)
Removed from Grants	67 (60.9)	45 (66.2)	30 (58.8)
Removed from Peer Review	84 (76.4)	59 (86.8)	44 (86.3)
Status of Compliance Review Open	79 (71.8)	65 (95.6)	31 (60.8)